

# The Protestant Reformed Seminary and the “Good Christian Schools” (2)

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Convocation Address

*Convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary were held on September 5, 2012 at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church of Grandville. The text of Prof. Cammenga’s address on that occasion continues here. First installment of the address can be found in the February 1, 2013 issue, p. 203.*

## The “Good Christian Schools”

Church Order, Article 21 calls Protestant Reformed officebearers, and by implication the Protestant Reformed Seminary, to promote “good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.” Thus far we have noticed that the calling is to promote good Christian *schools*, communal schools, schools to which the parents send their children and where they are instructed by others who stand in their place, the Christian school teachers. We also noticed that these schools are *parental schools*. It is not a government-run and government-funded public school, nor a church-operated parochial school, but a school owned and operated by like-minded parents.

In the third place, these good Christian schools are *Reformed* Christian schools. Church Order, Article 21 is the Church Order of the Reformed churches. It has its roots in the Reformed churches of the Lowlands. The “good Christian schools” are certainly schools that are “good” from an academic point of view, and the importance of academic excellence in these schools must not be minimized. But these schools are “good” Christian schools especially from a spiritual point of view. They are good *Christian* schools in distinction from the Christ-less public schools, under the dominion of the philosophy of humanism and evolution, and where immorality abounds.

As Reformed Christian schools, they are schools founded on the basis of the Reformed confessions. The teachers subscribe to the Reformed confessions. And the content of the instruction is in harmony with Holy Scripture as interpreted by the Reformed confessions. The Reformed world-and-life view is taught in these schools. And the Reformed view of the Christian life as gratitude and obedience to God by keeping His good commandments is included in the

curriculum, as well as exemplified in the teachers and enforced in the daily life of the school. It is the death of the schools as distinctively Reformed Christian schools that they repudiate the Reformed confessions and distinctively Reformed way of life. Time and again, Christian schools have done this in order to make a broader appeal, in the hope of increasing diminishing enrollment and income. And invariably the result has been the loss of the distinctive character of the Christian schools. They have sacrificed doctrinal integrity for numbers and dollars. And the irony is that, for the most part, this has not been adequate to save the majority of these schools from closing their doors.

Fourth, for us these good Christian schools are *Protestant Reformed* Christian schools. These are the good Christian schools that are to be promoted by Protestant Reformed officebearers and by the Protestant Reformed Seminary among the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Not only are we not satisfied with the public schools, the atheistic, antichristian public schools. But neither are we satisfied with the existing Christian schools, where the error of common grace has had very detrimental effects both on the philosophy of the education and the instruction given. Besides, this false teaching has also worked itself out in the lifestyle of those who have embraced it, a lifestyle antipathetic to the antithetical lifestyle of the Reformed faith, which teaches the children that we are called to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. In many of these schools the education stands in the service of the unbiblical endeavor to “Christianize” the world, in order to usher in the kingdom of God on this present earth.

To be sure, where it is not possible in the providence of God to establish a Protestant Reformed Christian school, our people make use of the best options available to them, including the existing Christian schools ordinarily. Our people use these schools thankfully. They make use of them until such a time as the Lord makes possible the establishment of our own Protestant Reformed Christian school or our own Protestant Reformed Christian high school. But the *good* Christian schools are Protestant Reformed Christian schools. Here our children are instructed in harmony with our religious convictions. Here our children are instructed by teachers who believe as we believe. And here they establish friendships, many of them lifelong friendships, with those who are one with them in the faith of the gospel. These, for us, are the “good Christian schools” of Church Order, Article 21.

### **Promoting the Basis for the “Good Christian Schools”**

But how, in principle and practically, are these good Christian schools to be promoted? And, more specifically, how is the Protestant Reformed Seminary to be involved in the promotion of these good Christian schools?

The Protestant Reformed Seminary involves itself in the promotion of the good Christian schools by faithful instruction of its students in and faithful defense of the doctrine of the gracious, unconditional, unilateral covenant of God established with elect believers and their Head in the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, and by promise also with the children of elect believers in their generations.

This is the principle upon which the Christian school rests, and must rest: God’s covenant with believers and their children. In the covenant, God promises to save believers and the children and children’s children of believers. This is “the promise” essentially as it is referred to throughout Deuteronomy 6: (v. 3), “as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee”; (v. 10), that which the Lord thy God did “sware unto thy fathers”; (v. 23), the Lord fulfilled all “which he sware unto our fathers.”

This promise is not a conditional promise, made with all the children who are baptized, which promise is dependent on the child's acceptance of the conditions of the promise and cooperation with God in fulfillment of the conditions of the covenant. The promise of God is not a universal promise that depends for its efficacy on the sinner, in this case the sinful child born to believing parents. The Protestant Reformed Churches repudiate the conditional covenant, and its bastard offspring, the Federal Vision. The conditional covenant is by *implication* what the Federal Vision is *openly and publicly*: a denial of all the tenets of the gospel of sovereign, particular grace. In our day, the Federal Vision has taken the conditional covenant to its logical and necessary conclusion. This is no basis for a "good" Christian school.

The good Christian school rests on the biblical and confessional truth of the unconditional covenant of grace. This is the truth that our part in the covenant is the fruit of God's grace in the covenant; that our part in the covenant is the thankful response of obedience for covenant grace already received; that our part in the covenant is the response of faith, which is the work in and gift of God to the elect believer. Our part in the covenant is not compliance with conditions fulfilled in order to become a member of the covenant, nor conditions fulfilled in order to remain in the covenant. Our part in the covenant is gratitude—thankful obedience, which is the sphere in which the friendship and fellowship of the covenant come to expression and are enjoyed.

This is Article 21 of the Church Order. Officebearers are to promote the good Christian schools in which parents have their children instructed "according to the demands of the covenant." The "demands of the covenant" of grace are at the basis for the establishment of the good Christian schools. Not the "conditions" of the covenant, but the "demands" of the covenant. The establishment and maintenance of the good Christian schools is grounded in the covenant of God, God's covenant of grace with believers and their children.

I dare say that the Protestant Reformed Seminary is the only seminary in the entire world, at least the only seminary of which I am aware, that teaches the truth that God's covenant, both in its establishment and in its maintenance or administration, is unconditional and unilateral. Even when there was controversy within the Protestant Reformed denomination in the early 1950s, controversy that resulted in the schism of 1953 in those churches, the Protestant Reformed Seminary never wavered. Its professors made not one concession to the Liberated doctrine of the covenant, which was essentially the Heynsian view of the covenant, which was the conditional covenant view. The seminary stood firm, and that firm stand of the seminary contributed in no small degree to the survival of the denomination and its preservation, by God's grace, in the truth of the unconditional covenant of grace.

This is the basis, the only basis, for the good Christian schools. This is the only basis, because having the truth of the unconditional covenant as the basis of the schools, God Himself is the basis of these schools, the fundamental truth about God Himself. That is the most solid basis that it is possible to have.

The Protestant Reformed Seminary fulfills its responsibility to Church Order, Article 21, its responsibility for the promotion of the good Christian schools, by teaching the young men preparing for the ministry the truth concerning the covenant of grace. Thus, the seminary prepares these men to preach and to teach this truth after they are ordained as ministers of the gospel. What an invaluable service to the churches!

This is not to take away from the contribution and the responsibility in this regard that the professors themselves have in their own writing, teaching, and preaching in the churches. In their sermons, in their writing for the *Standard Bearer* and the seminary's own *Protestant Reformed*

*Theological Journal*, and in the books they publish, in the lectures and classes that they lead in the churches (as, for example, Prof. Dykstra's classes on the schism of 1953 held in a number of our churches, in addition to which he is also researching and writing on the subject of Christian education while on sabbatical), in all their work in the denomination, professors past and present, active and emeritus, fulfill their responsibility in regard to Church Order, Article 21. This is certainly an important aspect of the seminary's promotion of the good Christian schools.

But chiefly the seminary fulfills its responsibility to Article 21 by the training of the future ministers and missionaries of the denomination and our sister-churches in the biblical and consistently Reformed doctrine of the covenant. Having received this training, the young men go out into the churches equipped to promote the good Christian schools, the schools "in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant."

. . . to be continued.

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